Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
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FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 14th February 2016: ICRISAT, 6.45AM.

The sprawling ICRISAT campus has a variety of habitats including lakes, forest patches, grasslands, cultivated areas and scrub. As a result, it has a unique mix of species and hence has always been among the most popular birding destinations in Hyderabad. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: "Strange Castaways": 4th part of BBC's "Wonders of the Monsoon" documentary series. Wednesday, 10th February 2016, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Step into a world where life is shaped by the greatest weather system on earth!

Monsoon winds sweep across a vast region every year, turning drought to deluge and shaping the landscapes, the wildlife and the cultures. All life here, from the highest peaks of the Himalayas to the scorched red earth of Australia, is dominated by this rampaging weather system.

RAPTOR MELA AT POCHARAM

Text and photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

Little Ringed Plover

Another energetic Sunday filled with lot of expectations for a good day of birding with my birding family Lawrence M, Amritha L, Gunbir Singh, Dheeraj, Sathvik, Vikramjit Singh, Anjali, Ambika and John. Great hopes and expectations were there as we started our day near Suchitra signal with a hot cup of tea at 5:30AM, after which we headed to Pocharam, the one location which has always welcomed us with some amazing species.

Short-toed Snake Eagle

We began our journey and, as we crossed Narsapur forest, there was our first sighting for the day - a Short-toed Snake Eagle fighting off a Common Kestrel. All the shutterbugs present were busy with the raptor for nearly 30-40 minutes and finally it decided to fly away from after giving some good poses.

Then we continued our journey towards Pocharam and on the way we stopped just before Medak for a few peafowl, which were sun-basking on the rocks. After spending some five minutes there, we finally decided that we had a serious rat problem in our tummies, for which we went to our usual breakfast location, Arjun Hotel opposite Medak bus station.

It was almost 7:30AM by the time we were satisfied, and decided to proceed to our destination, Pocharam. Reaching our location, we were welcomed by the amazing calls of many different birds in the area. We parked our cars and approached the lake to see what surprises were in store for us.

As we were walking towards the lake we spotted a Grey Heron which seemed quite friendly and wasn't flying away from us as we were getting progressively closer. Then we saw that it was trapped in the water with one of those traps that fishermen set.

Amritha with Grey Heron

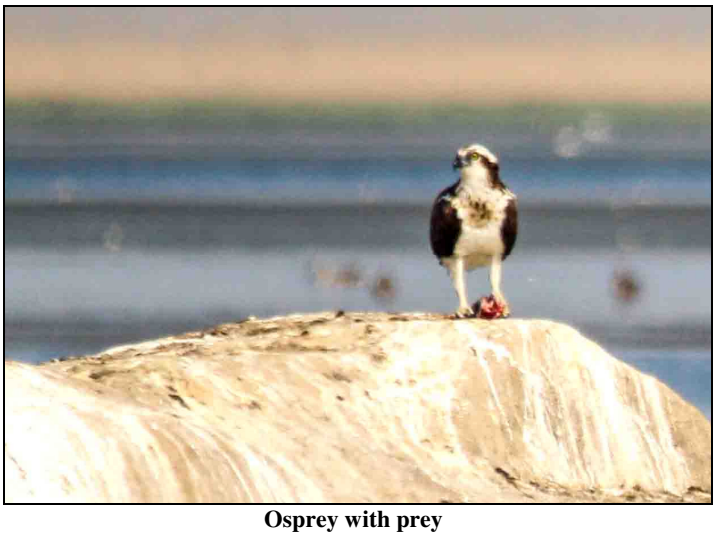
Here stepped in our rescuer, Amritha, who immediately got into the water and tried to rescue the bird from the trap.

During this process we heard a shout from one of our birders saying "RAAAPTORRRRR", and the attention of most of the people shifted from our rescuer to the big raptor flying over our head, which turned out to be a Bonelli's Eagle.

After clicking a few images, I again began to guide Amritha and the Grey Heron back safely to the shore, and tried to cut the knots of the trap and release the bird safely back in the water without any further damage. As a token of gratitude, it flew for a few seconds, landed close by to give us some good close-up images, and then finally flew away.

Brahminy Kite

After that we resumed our birding and were fascinated to see so many good species around - ducks and waders, small birds and raptors - e.g. Brahminy Kite, Black-bellied Tern, Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Common Pochard, Bronze-winged Jacana, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Eurasian Wigeon etc. We had a great time watching the birds flying around from all directions.



Osprey with prey

Then we spotted another biggie flying towards a big rock in the middle of the lake carrying a huge fish. It finally landed on the rock, and all the shutterbugs got busy clicking that bird. It seemed like it wasn't bothered by all of us watching it, and had decided to finish its fish no matter what. Oh, sorry - I haven't mentioned the species… It was an Osprey!

After about 30 minutes, we gave up on the idea that it would be flying any time soon, and deciding to continue with our birding, proceeded to the other parts of the lake. Finally, after 45-50 minutes of sitting on the rock and eating, it decided to take a small flight - it flew for about 30 seconds and then landed back on the same rock to finish the fish.

By now, we had spent about 3 hours, and decided to move to another site close by, named Bamanamma Cheruvu, which was just about 2 kms from the Pocharam lake. While we were coming out to the main road, we again spotted another big one, a Raptor again... All the shutterbugs were on the job of clicking the images, and we were trying to identify the bird. Finally we concluded that it was a Greater Spotted Eagle.

Greater Spotted Eagle

Heading to the lake nearby, we were surprised to see no water there. But as they say, "Never Back Down" - following this statement paid off well, as we spotted around 45 Plovers there. The most striking aspect was the golden body they had - yes, they were Pacific Golden Plovers!

Pacific Golden Plover

After spending some quality time with them, we decided to check out other lakes nearby, and headed towards Nizam Sagar Lake.

On the way, we stopped near some fields and saw one lone Woolly-necked Stork trying to catch some food. After taking some good images of the bird, we decided to proceed towards our next stop and, some 40 kms later, we arrived at a huge water body which was identified to be Safdulpur Lake. We stopped there for a while and enjoyed watching some Flamingos, Spoonbills and other birds.

Woolly-necked Stork

While here, we spotted a couple of more raptors - Brahminy Kite and Shikra. Now we had around seven raptors, and wanted to touch at least ten raptors for the day - as you know, when it comes to raptors, birders are greedy.

Black-tailed Godwit

After seeing some Minivets, Hornbills and other birds, we decided to proceed to our next stop which was Nizam Sagar. By now the time was about 1:00PM, and the rats were back, creating havoc inside our stomachs.

Proceeding towards our destination we were scouting for places to get something to eat, but in vain, and finally arrived at our destination. Thanks to Vikramjit Uncle's *upma* and *chutney,* supplemented by some junk food from the canteen there, we were able to regain our energy.

To our surprise there was absolutely no bird activity in the water, so we had to head back empty-handed without any clicks or sightings from that location. On the way back towards Hyderabad, we took the same route we had taken to reach there. As we were crossing Safdulpur Lake, we found a raptor again; this time it was a Marsh Harrier. We were excited as we were getting close to our figure of ten raptors, and we still had hope.

As we crossed Pocharam again, we decided to cover most of the distance without stopping anywhere. Then, 20 kms out of Medak, we spotted two more raptors. Not the finale I expected for our ten-raptor quest, but still they were raptors - Black-winged Kite and Black Kite. As we proceeded further we saw another raptor flying away from us and perching on a tree. The members in the second car identified it as the Oriental Honey Buzzard.

Grey Wagtail

We finally ended our day with almost 110 species, but had a sad feeling that after such an amazing day with the amazing beings called birds, we needed to get back to the concrete jungle and the corporate wildlife of life. Complete list of birds seen:

Short-toed Snake Eagle	Paddyfield Pipit	Cattle Egret
Common Kestrel	Ashy-crowned Sparrowlark	Eurasian Thick-knee
Shikra	Blue Rock Thrush	Purple Heron
Black Kite	Red-vented Bulbul	Indian Pond Heron
Black-winged Kite	Ashy Prinia	Grey Heron
Bonelli's Eagle	Plain Prinia	Black-headed Ibis
Brahminy Kite	Common Kingfisher	Red-naped Ibis
Osprey	Pied Kingfisher	Glossy Ibis
Greater Spotted Eagle	White-throated Kingfisher	Spot-billed Duck
Oriental Honey Buzzard	Asian Koel	Ruddy Shelduck
Eurasian Marsh Harrier	Indian Peafowl	Common Pochard
Blue Rock Pigeon	Eurasian Collared Dove	Bronze-winged Jacana
Large-billed Crow	House Sparrow	Pheasant-tailed Jacana
House Crow	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Eurasian Spoonbill
Spotted Dove	Indian Silverbill	Black-winged Stilt
Laughing Dove	Asian Palm Swift	Cotton Pygmy-goose
Black Drongo	Southern Coucal	Eurasian Wigeon
Green Bee-eater	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Red-wattled Lapwing
Barn Swallow	Small Minivet	Kentish Plover
Wire-tailed Swallow	Golden-fronted Leafbird	Little Ringed Plover
Common Myna	Grey Francolin	Pacific Golden Plover
Red-rumped Swallow	Common Quail	Greater Flamingo
Indian Roller	Brahminy Starling	Painted Stork
Common Tailorbird	Rosy Starling	Northern Shoveler
Baya Weaver	White-headed Babbler	Lesser Whistling-duck
Purple-rumped Sunbird	Oriental Magpie Robin	Little Cormorant
Large Grey Babbler	Common Sandpiper	Great Cormorant
Common Hoopoe	Wood Sandpiper	Grey-headed Swamphen
Indian Grey Hornbill	River Tern	Common Coot
Indian Robin	Whiskered Tern	Brown-headed Gull
Pied Bushchat	Black-bellied Tern	Black-tailed Godwit
White-browed Wagtail	Bar-headed Goose	Northern Pintail
Yellow Wagtail	Little Egret	Garganey
White Wagtail	Intermediate Egret	Common Redshank
Grey Wagtail	Large Egret	Little Grebe
Woolly-necked Stork		

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*)

Asian Brown Flycatcher (Ankola, Karnataka, 18-03-2012)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Muscicapidae
Genus: *Muscicapa*
Species: *M. dauurica*
Size: 13 cm

Description & distribution: The Asian Brown Flycatcher is a member of the Muscicapidae family of flycatchers. The length of 13 cm includes the cocked tail, which is relatively longer than the similar-looking but larger Spotted Flycatcher *M. striata*. The upperparts in the adult bird are grey-brown, which become greyer as the plumage ages, and underparts are pale with a light brownish wash on the flanks and breast. The pale lores are fairly extensive, and the large eyes have prominent white 'spectacles'. It has a large, dark bill with a marked pale base to the lower mandible, and the primary projections are shorter (about 80-90% of tertials) than other similar species like the Dark-sided Flycatcher *M. sibirica*. Its black legs help differentiate it from the Brown-breasted Flycatcher *M. muttui*, with which bird it has a range overlap in many places. Juvenile birds have buffish spotting on head and upperparts, whitish underparts with fine dark scaling on breast, and creamy-white wing-bars.

The Asian Brown Flycatcher breeds across Japan, eastern Siberia, northern China and in the Himalayan foothills and the hills of central and western India. It is migratory, wintering in tropical southern Asia, from southern India and Sri Lanka eastwards to Bangladesh and Indonesia. Besides, there are several vagrant reports from Britain, Ireland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Some literature designates the Asian Brown Flycatcher by the scientific name *M. latirostris*. It is generally regarded as monotypic, but Rasmussen and Anderton have presented the view that the populations seen in the Indian sub-continent and the Andamans are paler and browner above, have a deeper bill with a mostly pale lower mandible, less contrasting eye-ring, and a more mottled throat, breast and flanks; they describe this sub-species as *M. d. poonensis*.

Habitat & behaviour: The Asian Brown Flycatcher is commonly seen in temperate and sub-alpine open broad-leaved woodland forests, plantations, groves and near cultivated areas. Usually seen singly, it tends to sit on exposed perches, preferably near streams, and makes short aerial sallies to capture insects in the air before repeatedly returning to the same perch. It also occasionally picks up caterpillars and may even consume fruit and berries. During courtship, it sings a simple melodic song comprising short trills interspersed with whistling phrases; the usual call is a weak *sit-it-it-it*.

Nesting: The Asian Brown Flycatcher breeds from April to June. The nest is a compact cup of moss lined with lichen, feathers and fibres, usually built on a bare thick branch. The usual clutch is four eggs, incubated by the female who is fed by the male.

Local name: The Asian Brown Flycatcher is known as *'jhakki'* in Hindi, *'tavittupakshi'* in Malayalam, *'badami makhimar'* in Gujarati, and *'bhuri tik tiki'* in Punjabi.

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SIGHTING OF THE FERRUGINOUS POCHARD (*Aythya nyroca*) DURING THE AWC COUNTS - JANUARY 2016

Srikanth Bhamidipati, Lawrence Mathappan, Hemant Kumar & Humayun Taher

The White-eyed or Ferruginous Pochard (*Aythya nyroca*), also known as the Ferruginous Duck, is a medium-sized diving duck found in the Eurasian region. Very distinctively-coloured, the adult male is a rich chestnut colour with a darker back and a glaring yellow-white eye. The white underbelly and pure white undertail helps to distinguish this species from the somewhat similar Tufted Duck. The female is similar to the male, but somewhat duller, and with a dark eye. Juveniles are similar but the belly and undertail is grey-buff. In flight, a broad white wingbar extends onto the outer primaries. It is easily distinguished from other similar ducks by the white undertail when sitting and the extensive wingbar in flight. They are gregarious birds, forming large flocks in winter, often along with other diving species such as the Tufted Duck and the Common Pochard.

Ferruginous Pochard (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

During the course of the Annual Waterfowl Census counts for 2016 in the state of Telangana, Srikanth, Lawrence and Hemant sighted 5 Ferruginous Pochards in a small tank close to a main road. The tank in which the birds were sighted was about 1 metre deep, with a good growth of water-lilies and other aquatic plants. The birds were observed as staying in a more open part of the tank, where the water-lily leaves were somewhat thinner. Although the Ferruginous Pochard is described as being somewhat shy, the team was able to observe that such was not always the case - the birds appeared to be quite at ease in this place, although the level of disturbance was high, due to the proximity of the tank to the main arterial highway. It was also noted that the birds appeared to associate with other species (Cotton Pygmy Goose, Comb Duck, Northern Pintail, Gadwall and Indian Spot-billed Duck). This is interesting in that although the birds are said to associate with other diving ducks, their association with dabbling ducks is not anywhere mentioned.

Going by extant historical records and references, it seems quite probable that the Ferruginous Pochard, though not unknown from our region, remains a rarely seen and unusual visitor to the state. Old records notwithstanding, it is clear that there is not sufficient data available from recent times, to make even a reasonable estimate of current probable wintering populations in either Andhra Pradesh or Telangana States. Also given its current status of Near-Threatened/Declining in the IUCN Red Data List, it is perhaps a good time to make a plea to all naturalists and birdwatchers to keep an eye open for these birds and to write in with any sightings that may be made. Historical sightings, I may mention, would be equally as interesting to us as any current sightings.

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For Private Circulation Only
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